1: Grigson G-5 (1927-1934) 1949
AW32 Gond AW32
Hill Maria
Bison Horn Maria

Dongar, sleeping the first night at Orcha, twenty-five miles from Kurmer, descending in the morning fourteen miles to Dhaurai, doing their selling and buying and eating a noon meal, and then return that afternoon to sleep again at Orcha, reaching Kurmer on the third day by noon. And their route is no easy one, but up hill and down dale along rough mountain paths. The men will carry heavy loads balanced at either end of a carrying stick borne on their shoulder, proceeding at a jog trot, for nine or ten miles over similar paths, but stop to drink and paddle at the streams, and get very exhausted if they have to carry weights much farther; on the other hand, after food and an hour's rest they are ready to walk back at once to their villages. Three Hill Marias on my last visit to the hills came to my camp at Itulnar some seventy miles across country, with letters, and met me on the march at 8 a.m. in the hills on the third morning after they had set out, having done twelve miles that morning along an exceptionally arduous mountain path. When the crops are ripe on the *penda* slopes and the men are sleeping there, the women go twice a day to them with their food, and sometimes have a heavy day's reaping as well; the *penda* may be five or six miles away from the village and high above it.

Like the Nagas of the Assam hills, the Hill Marias prefer walking over hilly country to long treks on the plains, and are excellent hill and tree climbers. All the Koitor of Bastar, in fact, are remarkably agile tree climbers, and seem to walk up trees rather than climb.

The Bison-horn Maria is even better developed physically than the Hill Maria, and has similar powers of endurance, though on the level plateau villages he does not become the adept hill climber that every Hill Maria is. He leaves less, however, to his women. He can be seen at his physical fittest when dancing for hours with tireless verve and agility, wearing on his head a heavy head-dress of bison-horns with plumes of peacock and jungle-cock feathers and strings of cowries, with a heavy cylindrical drum of hollowed tree-trunk three feet or more long slung from his shoulders, and sometimes carrying a small son frogwise on his chest. He will carry stick-loads of grain sixty or seventy miles to market in the Godavari valley, for even he makes as yet only little use of carts or beasts of burden; the Hill Maria makes none at all.

The Hill Maria wears nothing but a loin-cloth of coarse cotton in winter, summer and rains, though an occasional man may have a piece of similar cloth big enough to wrap over his shoulders at night, and a few headmen have blankets. His body, therefore, is inured to heat and to great cold; for frosts are frequent in his hills, and even as late as the end of March the thermometer may fall to 42°.

2: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1947 AW32 Gond AW32
Muria

THE MURIA'S LIVELIHOOD

Penda is not common among the Muria; it is practised only by those living in the hilly country near the Raughat and in the Abujhmar foothills of the south. *Dippa* and *parka* are the special Muria methods. They are, of course, transitional forms of cultivation from the very primitive *penda* to ordinary plough-agriculture, for they require the use of cattle.

In a *dippa* clearing the trees and bushes are cut in February after the Kare Pandum, when Tallur Muttai is offered a hollow bamboo split down the middle, before which cutting is taboo. The wood is spread over the clearing and left to dry. For *parka*, the wood is cut elsewhere and carried to the field in a shouldered carrying-pole called *asur* or *bhirni*; it is thrown onto the ground and spread fairly evenly across the field.

Before cutting the first *parka*, the Kaser-Gaita spends the night with all the men of the village in the ghotul to ensure that none of them approach their wives who, as menstruating creatures, are always potentially dangerous. He himself cooks and eats apart. In the morning they go to the village shrine and offer sacrifice to all the deities connected with the village, especially remembering Mother Earth and the Departed, saying, 'Let the harvest be good, and let no ill befall us'.

The Gaita then cooks the head of the goat or pig that was sacrificed before the shrine, and small portions are distributed. He sends the chelik to cut the wood. As they first swing their axes they cry *Kiddari puda*—referring to the genitals of the well-omened kiddari bird. The villagers bring burnt rice, soot from the bottom of their cooking-pots, water and gourds. When the wood has been cut the Gaita says, 'Give the chelik some food', and the villagers smear the boys' faces with soot and force a little burnt rice into their mouths.

FIG. 1. Kuvi digging-stick of iron
Length 1' 7"

All are now free to cut the wood for their fields. From this point we may treat the two types of cultivation together. Indeed *dippa* often shades off into *parka*, for where there are not enough trees in a *dippa* clearing, a supplementary supply has to be cut elsewhere and brought as for *parka*.

In some villages there is a ceremonial burning of a small patch of *parka* at the time of the Wijja Pandum; I describe this in detail in Chapter XXIV. In other places, the ritual of the first firing is done at the time just before the rains. The Kaser-Gaita sleeps as usual in the ghotul and then goes with the chelik to his own field. He offers liquor to the local gods, and starts the burning with a smouldering bit of paddy rope taken from the ghotul fire.[1] The other villagers come and all light their own fires from this.

To spread the ashes evenly over the field, the Muria use a long rake called the *harlat* or *balla* (*dhoona* in Halbi). This is simply a very long pole with a board attached to the end. It is, in Muria riddle, 'the snake that wriggles all over the field'. They wear *harpunj* sandals of sambhar hide or wooden shoes called *kutuak* to protect their feet from the hot ground, none the less bearable for the burning sun at the hottest time of the year. The urine turns dark and burns and for a few days the whole tribe endures a sort of urethritis. 'The town people suffer for sex, but we for our field-work', as a man at Phulpar explained.

[1] The young keep a fire burning night and day in their *mandagarh* dormitory, and usually ignite their clearings from it.

3: Elwin E-5 (1935-1942) 1943
AW32 Gond AW32
Bison Horn Maria

CHAPTER TWO

THE BISON-HORN MARIA

I

The so-called Maria of Bastar fall naturally into two divisions distinguished by many details of culture and tradition, the Hill Maria of the Abujhmar Mountains and the Bison-horn Maria living to the south of the Indrawati River. A full account of both these tribes has been given by W. V. Grigson, and his book should be read by those who wish to have a fuller background of Maria life than the present volume can supply. In this chapter I will only give a brief summary of the life and customs of the Bison-horn Maria.

The Bison-horn Maria, who are distinguished from the other aboriginals of Bastar by the splendid head-dress they use for their marriage dances, numbered about 156,000 in 1931, and I estimate their present strength at about 175,000. They are distributed all over southern Bastar, among the entrancing hills of Dantewara, in the dry forests of Bijapur, among the hot but lovely lowlands of Konta, in the remote Sukma and Kutru Zamindaris. On the borders of the main Maria stock are a number of communities which really belong to it, the Koya of the extreme south, the Dorla who claim to be a superior caste and the mixed population along the banks of the Indrawati and reaching up towards the Muria country beyond Barsur. The Dorla and Koya dance in Bison-horn Maria fashion; the mixed people to the north combine the customs of the Hill Maria with their own. In the neighbourhood of Jagdalpur, the Maria gradually lose their distinctiveness as they approach the town and merge into the southern Muria.

There are few people in India more attractive than the Bison-horn Maria, physically charming, of good stature, perfect figure, finely featured with carefully tended hair, often a lovely golden-brown in colour. Both men and women are very strong; the men can carry heavy loads great distances, endure long and arduous hunting expeditions and dance all night bearing their great drums. Their health is fairly good, but they are afflicted with yaws, though the work of the